

A Coalition of the Willing: Urban Land Readjustment as a Novel Approach for Sustainable Area Development

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SUMMARY

The Netherlands, a small but urbanized nation in Europe, is globally known as a ‘planner’s paradise’. Part of the toolkit of the Dutch planning system is a land policy instrument called land readjustment. For more than a century, land readjustment allowed for the transformation of a staggering amount of rural areas through the exchange of ownership. Government decided on the goals that had to be achieved in a designated area, and the Cadastre guaranteed the legal certainty for involved parties. Land readjustment can formally be practiced in a compulsory or a voluntary mode, and up till now, was applied exclusively in rural areas. However, due to urbanization, societal challenges tend to manifest increasingly in the urban built environment. Different European and Asian countries therefore already have rules and regulations for the exchange of ownership in built up areas. Dutch national government is currently sorting out rules for urban land readjustment as part of the integrated Planning & Environment Act (‘Omgevingswet’). Such new legislation is based on the concept that by empowering society to take control of the living environment, the opposition and public costs associated with area(re)development should be reduced. The public must be willing and able to positively impact the living environment, without extensive and expensive governmental influence. Such reasoning only allows for a voluntary mode of urban land readjustment. As of July 2016, a unique collaborative pilot program for Urban Land Readjustment (‘Stimuleringsprogramma Stedelijke Kavelruil’) between the responsible Ministry and the Cadastre has supported 14 projects that experiment with voluntary land readjustment in advance of new legislation.

Expectations run high on the results of these urban experiments, relying on the Dutch tradition of cooperation that has been traced back to the nation’s successful fight against flooding. In April 2019, the pilots will be evaluated for the performance of land adjustment as an approach for sustainable land use in the urban built environment. A key question is if a compulsory tool for the

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urban context is in fact required, as has been demonstrated for the rural land readjustment tool. If this is the case, the program gives cause to rethink the upcoming Planning & Environment Act before it has been implemented. The paper aims to reflect on the pilot projects' results, and their significance in an international context.

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